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**SMUGGLERS OF NEW SOUTHEAST ASIAN METHAMPHETAMINE TABLETS
ARRESTED FOLLOWING INDICTMENT BY FEDERAL GRAND JURY**

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney John K. Vincent announced today that several individuals were arrested after a federal grand jury returned indictments on August 15, 2002, charging numerous individuals with, among other things, conspiracy to import methamphetamine pills, known as Ya Ba, and use of the mails to facilitate the importation.

Kao Khae Saephan, 37, Foo Weuy Saephan, 53, and Yao Yuan Saephan, 42, all of Sacramento, are charged in a multi-count indictment with conspiracy to import Ya Ba by way of the U.S. Mail on numerous occasions beginning in 2000 until the present.

Luang Finh Saechao 56, of Sacramento, Weun Sinh Saelee, 52, and his brother, Weun Nyan Saelee, aka Ryan Lee, 42, both of Lodi, are charged with importing Ya Ba and opium in January 2001.

Luang Chang Saechao, aka Billy Chao, 33, and Lou Ting Saetern, 34, both of Sacramento, are charged in a separate conspiracy to import Ya Ba on numerous occasions.

Kouei Meng Saechao, 59, and Meuy Luang Saefong, 53, husband and wife, also of Sacramento, are also charged in a conspiracy to import Ya Ba using the U.S. Mail.

Two other defendants, Saan Meng Saelee, 35, and Muang Fou Saelee, 28, husband and wife, both of Sacramento, are currently awaiting a September trial on federal charges of importing Ya Ba. Luu Ian Saevang, 35, also of Sacramento, is also awaiting trial in federal court on separate charges of importing Ya Ba.

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Anne Pings, who is prosecuting the cases, the maximum penalty under federal law for conspiracy to import Ya Ba depends on the number of Ya Ba tablets imported. If convicted, some of the defendants in these cases face 10 year

mandatory minimum federal sentences, with maximum life sentences.

Ya Ba, which is Thai for "crazy drug," is a potent tablet form of methamphetamine, a dangerous and addictive central nervous system stimulant. According to the United States Customs Service Resident Agent in Charge of Sacramento, Daniel R. Lane, Ya Ba pills are reportedly manufactured by the hundreds of millions in the Shan state of Myanmar (formerly Burma), then smuggled into neighboring Thailand and Laos. According to published reports, production of methamphetamine tablets in the so-called Golden Triangle region (Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand) is reportedly surpassing heroin in economic importance. The use of Ya Ba is now considered a serious problem in Thailand where there are reports that an estimated 3 million people use the drug on a regular basis. According to Mr. Lane, the pills are brightly colored and flavored like candy, purportedly to make them appealing to young people, and can be orally ingested but are more commonly smoked.

Shipments of Ya Ba pills have been detected by United States Customs Service Inspectors stationed at international mail facilities in Oakland, South San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Honolulu, as well as at the seaport in Oakland. Typically, the pills are hidden inside other objects such as candles, statues, hollowed-out cigarettes, and hollowed-out pieces of furniture.

Over the last two years, the United States Customs Service has been making regular seizures of Ya Ba shipments originating in Thailand or Laos, including numerous shipments destined for addresses in the Sacramento area.

These cases are the product of an extensive investigation led by the U.S. Customs Service with assistance from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Sacramento Police Department.

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